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SUBJECT: GENERAL TERRORISM THREAT ASSESSMENT IN UZBEKISTAN

REF: TASHKENT 447

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RSO; REASON: 1.4(D)

1.(S/NF) Summary: The April 3 signing of the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) agreement whereby Uzbekistan will allow commercial transit of non-lethal supplies to U.S. forces in Afghanistan (ref: Tashkent 447) will raise somewhat the profile of Uzbekistan as a target for Taliban and Al Qaeda attack. Given the lack of information sharing with Uzbek security services, however, it is difficult to estimate the degree of threat. We will continue to seek more information from the Uzbeks and, meanwhile, will continue to exercise prudent security measures.

2.(S/NF) The terrorism threat environment in Uzbekistan is difficult to estimate due to lack of information sharing with local security forces stemming from ongoing distrust in U.S.-Uzbek bilateral relations. In 2004 a suicide bomber killed himself and two Uzbek policemen outside of the old Embassy in Tashkent. Suicide bombers also attacked the Israeli Embassy and an Uzbek government building. Since then the Uzbek authorities have taken heavy measures to ensure that these incidents are not repeated. However, it is clear from intelligence reporting that terrorist groups continue to plan attacks aimed at advancing extremist Islamic goals in Central Asia.

3.(S/NF) Bomb threats and incidents continue to occur here in Tashkent. Several months ago the wife of one of the Embassy local guards witnessed a bomb squad blow up an object in place after it was thrown through the fence around the National Security Service (NSS) hospital compound. On another occasion the Embassy's mobile patrol came upon a scene outside one of the city subway stations at night where the area had been cordoned off. A bomb squad was present, and a policeman stated that a telephonic bomb threat had been received and the subway station had been evacuated. The bomb squad was there to search for anything suspicious in the subway station and in the immediate area. In both of these instances the response to Embassy inquiries was that these events did not happen or that they were merely training.

4.(S/NF) The Uzbek authorities do not share any kind of threat information with anybody. The security officers from the British, Israeli, and German Embassies, as well as the security officer from the United Nations, echo the fact that the Uzbeks keep us all in the dark as to any terrorist threats or activities. All agree that the Uzbeks will happily accept information but will not share what they might know. This is a reality that makes judging the terrorism threat environment here very difficult, if not almost impossible.

Implications of NDN?

5.(S/NF) In this environment, therefore, it is difficult to determine what heightened risk may result from the April 3 agreement with the GOU on the Northern Distribution Network, if any. The supply routes through Pakistan have been attacked repeatedly and the opening of new supply routes through Uzbekistan could refocus the terrorists' attention on this country. Since the Uzbeks do not share any information it is very difficult to assess the ability of their military, police, and security forces to counter any new threats. At the April 3 signing, Defense Minister Berdyev and Deputy Defense Minister Niyazov told the Ambassador

they intend to minimize Uzbekistan's profile on NDN "in order not to help our enemies."

6.(S/NF) Post will raise the issue of a possible heightened risk at all appropriate levels within Uzbek law enforcement with no expectation of open discussion on the issue. Meanwhile, we have reviewed our security posture and reminded staff to continue observing normal security precautions with an eye to avoiding complacency in this uncertain environment.

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